

A/ out, been moved, or the patient's medication may have been changed. Medications may be returned to the decentralized storage location 12-1. Certain types of medications may simply be replaced in the decentralized storage location 12-1 so as to be used in another dispensing operation, or may need to be disposed of.

AB [0058] As seen from Table 1, carousels may easily be 10 feet or more in width. Because the carousel must be designed based on the heaviest item to be dispensed, the carousel may be considerably over -designed for many of the items to be carried. According to another aspect of the present invention, a carousel 88 may have a "slot-machine" design as shown in FIG. 9. The carousel 88 of FIG. 9 has a plurality of tracks 52, each having its own electric motor 56 and drive gears (not shown). Each of the drive tracks 52 has connected to it its own plurality of bins arranged in a plurality of rows 50. In that way, the carousel 88 may be designed in a number of discreet columns with one of the columns designed for dispensing heavier items, and the other columns designed for dispensing lighter items. The column dispensing the lighter items need not be engineered to carry the same amount of weight as the column designed to carry the heavier items, and therefore can be made more inexpensively. Additionally, because it is to dispense lighter items, a smaller motor may be used as well as different gearing. Another advantage of the "slot-machine" concept is the need for varying speeds in the automation. The fast moving items will be stored in the fast moving tracks and the heavier and bulkier items in a slower moving track. The multiple rotating columns could minimize wait times for the operator by indexing to the next pick location in the columns where the operator is not currently picking.

AB [0088] While the present invention has been described in connection with exemplary embodiments thereof, those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that many modifications and variations are possible. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention is intended to be limited only by the following claims and to any equivalents thereof.

In the Claims

Please add the following new claims and cancel claims 1-13.